

PROCEEDINGS OF THE HISTORIC CONSERVATION BOARD

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2004

3:00 P.M., J. MARTIN GRIESEL ROOM, CENTENNIAL PLAZA II

The Historic Conservation Board met at 4:00 P.M., following a joint review conducted with the Urban Design Review Board (see attached minutes), with members Kirk, Kreider, Raser, Senhauser, Spraul-Schmidt, Sullebarger, and Wallace present. Absent: Bloomfield

MINUTES

The minutes of the Monday, January 12, 2004 meeting were unanimously approved as amended.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN REVIEW, CENTRAL PARKWAY TO 12TH STREET, BETWEEN VINE AND JACKSON STREETS, OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Mr. Senhauser stated that the Historic Conservation Board is reviewing the preliminary design of the proposed parking garage/mixed-use building for a Certificate of Appropriateness based on the Over-the-Rhine Historic District guidelines and for compliance to the Zoning Code. He requested that individuals wishing to address the Board tailor their testimony toward what the Board has purview to review.

James Tarbell, City of Cincinnati Councilmember, stressed the importance of designing the prominent Central Parkway façade as a front entrance to the building, which the most recent revision is still not reflecting. He pointed out that the area from Walnut to Vine and perhaps as far as Main to Race is becoming better defined as an arts district with this development being the centerpiece. He suggested incorporating a creative element on the Central Parkway façade to reflect the nature of the district. The district could be further defined by placing individual marquees at the intersections of Central Parkway and Vine, Jackson, and Walnut Streets to announce events at the Ensemble Theater, the Emery, and the Art Academy of Cincinnati or by one large marquee on the Central Parkway façade.

Mr. Tarbell expressed concern that there would be little interaction with the street. He asked that consideration be given to reclaiming the mixed-use nature of Vine Street, even if that meant fewer housing units above. Mr. Tarbell acknowledged the importance of all four facades. He pointed out that one of the reasons the Hale-Justis housing units were successful was due to the view to the west, which will be gone for a number of the units. He expressed the importance of replacing that view and others lost with the construction.

Tom Besanceney, President of the Over-the-Rhine Chamber of Commerce, stated that this gateway project would include the first new for-sale housing in Over-the-Rhine in some time. The Chamber is concerned that the units will not be marketable in terms of how they relate to the street or their view. (He noted that the Chamber had envisioned air rights on top of the garage.) In addition, Over-the-Rhine needs at least 200 additional parking spaces with ingress and egress during the day to adequately accommodate the area including the Art Academy and eventually the Emery Theater. The Chamber concluded they would rather sacrifice the residential units to accommodate sufficient parking at the site.

Chris Frutkin, City Center Properties, stated that the e-mail from Frank Russell (distributed to the Board) addressed his primary concern regarding views from the Hale-Justis lofts. He explained that he has 30 apartments in the Hale-Justis building, which they hope to make condominiums in 2½ years when the tax abatement ends. A number of the units face west and have spectacular views, which will be lost with the new construction. He asked that the designers consider greenscaping the east elevation to mitigate the loss of views. In reply to Mr. Raser, Mr. Frutkin stated that they had not discussed their concerns with the design team, although they would like the opportunity and would be open to other aesthetic treatments.

In reply to Mr. Frutkin, Chad Munitz, Director of the City Manager's Economic Development Division, stated that the City's Parking Facilities' funds would be used to finance the parking garage. The City has not finalized the funding for the residential units, but he did not anticipate that Tax Increment Financing would be used since they would likely use tax abatement.

Marge Hammelrath, Over-the-Rhine Foundation, expressed concern with the design of the residences, describing the structure as a red façade over affordable housing. She stated that the design is not compatible with the district, noting that most of the buildings in the area have commercial on the first floor and allow for interaction with the street. She felt this interaction was especially needed on the Vine and Jackson Street elevations to provide for a safer area. She also expressed concern that the flow of vehicular traffic was limited to the exits on Vine and 12th Streets and felt it could endanger the patrons of the Ensemble Theater who generally cross Vine at the middle of the block. She had hoped the building would have been set back farther to allow for more greenspace, but suggested if the proposed design is approved, they consider using self-watering flower boxes.

Gregory Smith, President of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, explained that the Art Academy intends to move to 12th and Jackson in the summer of 2005. He stated that there is an abundance of retail and housing in the area, but there is a need for additional parking. He questioned what changes could be made to the project at this point and to whom comments could be directed, since he thought that parking should be given greater consideration.

Mr. Smith stated that the design needs to reflect the fact that it is being developed in the 21st century, yet also needs to acknowledge its location in the historic district. He suggested that what has been proposed does not balance those two considerations in an effective manner. He agreed with a suggestion that the Jackson Street façade should incorporate more brick and that more attention should be given to the depth and shadows created in the planes of the building. He pointed out that with Central and Vine being the primary thoroughfares, those facades should be given the most important treatment.

In response to Ms. Wallace, he stated that when the Art Academy was not allocated the 100 spaces they had hoped for in the proposed parking garage, he requested 50 spaces for the Art Academy's faculty and staff. They will have to find an alternative solution for the additional 50 spaces.

In response to Mr. Senhauser, Mr. Kimbler indicated they would have a revised plan before the Board in two weeks.

BOARD ACTION

Because this was a preliminary design review, no action was required by the Board.

[Mr. Kirk joined the meeting.]

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS, 1615 VINE STREET, OVER-THE-RHINE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Staff member Caroline Kellam presented the staff report on this request for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of a permanent freestanding business identification sign at the northwest corner of West Liberty and Vine Streets in the Over-the-Rhine Historic District. The Franciscan Friars wish to identify and provide direction to the numerous services they offer to the community in their complex, referred to as Franciscan Corner. The complex includes several buildings stretching along West Liberty and Vine.

Ms. Kellam explained that the applicant is proposing a permanent, three-part, arched, bronze, anodized aluminum freestanding sign. The sign will be 21'-0" tall, 22'-6" wide, with 3" letters. The text will identify the Franciscan Corner and include a list of the services, directional information, mass times, and the Franciscan mission statement. The sign will project above and be situated behind an existing 7' brick wall that encloses a garden at the corner of Vine and West Liberty Streets. All of the trees in the garden will be retained.

Ms. Kellam stated that the Over-the-Rhine Historic District guidelines only address projecting signs and specify that signs be designed for clarity, legibility, and compatibility with the building or property on which they are located. While the material is compatible with the district, the excessive height disturbs the scale of the site. Staff feels there is an excessive amount of text and questions the readability of the sign. Therefore, staff recommends reducing the height of the sign and including only the name of the corner, the mission statement, church name, and mass times on a total of three panels. If desired, the applicant could submit additional directional and/or identification signs later. In reply to Mr. Senhauser, Ms. Kellam clarified that the sign would be part of an overall program, so that if additional signs were submitted, they would be uniform in style.

The applicant, Andrea Ward of Holthaus Signs, and Fr. Greg Friedman were present to address the Board. Fr. Friedman explained that the sign is the last part of a program they undertook a few years ago, at the time the St. Anthony Messenger building was completed. The arched design is a continuation of the arches of the church. Fr. Friedman explained that the sign is directed toward their walking clientele and visitors that frequent the complex for business affairs (primarily at the St. Anthony Messenger building and Friary) and not necessarily toward people in cars. He stated that the complex can be confusing and there is a need for direction. He was apprehensive about identification signs on any buildings, since he was concerned it would attract graffiti. He suggested that the height of the sign was appropriate since the elongated nature of the arches allowed greenery from the courtyard to be visible. He requested that the Board approve their sign as proposed since it contained information they considered necessary.

The Board complimented the design of the sign and felt it was compatible with the district, although they were concerned with the height. They agreed that the directional

information was needed, but suggested eliminating the panel with their mission statement. They could include an abbreviated version of the mission statement

elsewhere. This would allow them to lower the overall height of the sign by approximately 5½'. Fr. Friedman was amenable to the suggestions.

BOARD ACTION

The Board voted unanimously (motion by Sullebarger, second by Kreider) to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of a new three-part sign at the Franciscan complex at Liberty and Vine Streets with the following conditions:

1. The arched mounting frame be no taller than 17'-0";
2. The overall size of each of the three rectangular sign panels be 6'-2"x 5'-0";
3. Any additional plans for smaller directional and identification sign for different locations (on those buildings without signs) should be submitted to the Urban Conservator for review and approval, with materials and style of any additional signs consistent with the signs approved under this Certificate of Appropriateness; and
4. Final plans for the revised corner sign be reviewed and approved by the Urban Conservator prior to issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness and a building permit.

ADJOURNMENT

As there were no other items for consideration by the Board, the meeting adjourned.

William L. Forwood
Urban Conservator

John C. Senhauser
Chairman

Date